

Background

“In 2009 and through 2010 a growing concern was voiced among professional foresters and biologists, conservationists, academics, community leaders, forest industry support companies and First Nations that British Columbia (BC) forests are in need of greater attention to meet societal expectations over the long-term. This concern generated the Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities: A conversation on BC forests (HFHC), a non-partisan, volunteer supported initiative to provide an opportunity for experts, communities and concerned citizens to inform decision-makers (Government and/or forest industry) of their views and concerns regarding management of BC forests.”¹ Six key issues emerged from the 20 Community Dialogue Sessions hosted in 2011 to identifying community issues and suggested actions. In summary, these are:

1. We need to be better informed regarding the state of local forest lands.
2. We need more influence on decisions regarding management of local forest lands.
3. More diverse economic development opportunities are needed from forest lands.
4. We need more sustainable, integrated resource management.
5. We need better monitoring and assessment of local forest lands management.
6. Private forest lands need a higher level of stewardship.

During a conference call with the original workshop organizers and members of academic institutions with forestry-related programs in BC, each issue was assigned to one or more institutions for the second phase of workshops. This second phase involves engaging experts, on an invitation-only basis, to identify key recommendations that would address the issues listed above.

Dr. Kathy Lewis² and Dr. Greg Halseth³ from UNBC agreed to work with issue number 4. In addition to the issue, there were a number of potential topics identified as follows:

Issue #4: We need more sustainable, integrated resource management

- a) What mechanisms are needed to generate a provincial forest lands vision and associated documents to guide legislation, regulation, policy and forest practices?
- b) What mechanisms are needed to ensure governance instruments are consistent with delivery of the provincial and community visions?
- c) What changes are needed to policies and regulations regarding management of overlapping resources, creating regulatory efficiencies and minimizing cumulative impacts?

¹ <http://bcforestconversation.com/wp-content/uploads/Press-Release-January-20121.pdf>

² Professor and Chair of the Ecosystem Science and Management Program.

³ Professor in the Geography Program, Canada Research Chair in Rural and Small Town Studies, Director of the Community Development Institute at UNBC

Questions

The UNBC organisers found the issue and the topics provided to be very broad and were concerned about the ability to develop meaningful recommendations within a half-day workshop. Consequently the issue was refined down to just two questions that address at least part of the issue and are manageable.

1. What is needed to obtain sustainable resource management? What do we not have that is necessary to be prepared to implement sustainable resource management?
2. What are the first steps that should be taken to obtain sustainable, integrated resource management and who should take these steps: government; industry; communities; a combination of groups?

These two questions provided the focus for a facilitated workshop held at the University of Northern British Columbia on the evening of 03 October 2012. Nine local experts joined the two UNBC organisers in an energetic and informative session. Everyone came with a creative and open mind, generously shared their experiences and wisdom, left their day jobs at the door, and worked collaboratively to build a constructive and positive conversation.

Conversation

Synthesising the conversation throughout the evening, three key components necessary to ensure sustainable integrated resource management were identified by the participants:

- **Vision** – we need to know what we want from the land base.
- **Information** – we need to know how to measure whether we are succeeding.
- **Decision making** – we need integrity and accountability in the functional relationship between strategic and operational decisions.

Vision

Participants identified that there appears to be no consistent vision of integrated sustainable resource management. The most obvious current vision seems to be driven by resource royalty rents, jobs and the needs of the economy, but perhaps innovation and industry investment patterns are not leading to job creation or sustained revenues to the province. In addition, focus on the economic drivers might jeopardise long-term sustainability of the environment and the economy. There is only one forest, but lots of different uses and industries seeking resources. In many areas, the landbase is over-subscribed. There is a need to consider habitat

implications in terms of supply and ecological function. Concerns were also expressed that there is increasingly limited local benefit flow from local resource wealth generation. “Flip-flops” in operational decisions appear to be politically motivated and not influenced by a consistent vision.

Recent public processes suggest that fewer people seem to be interested in such processes. There is a different industry landscape today: less company involvement in the community and less obvious public attachment to the industry in some regions. Conditions are not the same as in the 90s when there was significant public engagement and involvement. People appear less informed on the issues. Communicating the value of public engagement is a constant challenge, yet the public does get involved, after the fact, when there are decisions they do not like. So, effective public engagement is critical.

Participants noted that there are questions relating to who sets out the forest values we go after. Issues remain around identifying, evaluating, ranking and sorting the different values and there are challenges with shaping change to create more social and economic benefit from the landscape. Legal objectives appear to lag behind social objectives.

A well defined vision of integrated sustainable resource management is needed. There was recognition that there would be differences of vision depending on scale. At the same time, the strategic provincial vision needs to incorporate the regional vision which in turn captures the local vision. We need to move away from competing visions and get back to a unified vision for the land base built through interdependence and inclusiveness. And the vision needs to remain a key touchstone for maintaining integrity in decision making.

The vision would be developed through determining a congruence of the different values associated with the land base as seen through the lens of the economy, the environment and society to create a starting vision based on points of agreement.

The LRMP process included these elements in the planning process. However, the LRMP route to defining an integrated sustainable resource management vision for the province that incorporates the values set out above is a costly, time consuming and operationally challenging exercise. We need a different model for allowing a broad range of stakeholders to engage in the discussion. For the most part, land in BC is publicly owned and stakeholders will need to reflect that wide spectrum of interest. Utilising local or regional NGOs to lead the process and host the conversation would provide a measure of independence in shepherding the process and growing ownership. Local ownership of the process and its outcomes is key to ensuring that local values are reflected in the rolled up vision.

The Forest Stewardship Council of Canada model, while focussing on different objectives, may provide an example of how this might work. The model, which utilises experts as well as public engagement, is integrated and place-based.

The Province of British Columbia is the landowner and thus the responsibility for developing the broad overall vision lies with the province. Recognising the costs of any consultative engagement process, there may be opportunities for examining and fine tuning a number of models through a pilot process. This process would test public and stakeholder engagement methods, integration of expert advice and the process for incorporating local values and visions into a strategic provincial vision.

Information

Landscape based information is critical to link decision making with the vision. Participants noted that identifying information needs will depend in large part on the nature of the vision. What we need to know will be linked to values and the scale of the landscape being considered. There are large gaps, but we do have lots of information and knowledge. We need to ensure that we do not duplicate effort where data and information is available. We can also bridge some gaps with expert evaluation of related indicators. Information is available at different scales, and we should aggregate what is already there (local to regional to provincial).

There remain questions of scope. How do we capture all the values in a landscape and weight them appropriately in decision making? Identifying and quantifying all the values on all the land base is a very onerous undertaking.

There is a need for specific inventory type information at multiple levels and layers of detail, and we are getting better at inventories. Some events, for example the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation, forest fires and climate change, impact inventory knowledge a lot. We have strategic level inventories that no longer meet local needs because of place-based climate change impacts. We have significant industries generating economic value but poor future inventory knowledge. This needs to be fixed.

We need better information and we need to be strategic about what and how we gather that information. We might want to identify areas to focus on, such as areas impacted by MPB, high activity, etc. Knowledgeable experts can create valuable aggregated information from a limited sample of useful data.

Flexible models and tools for identifying and quantifying values and triaging “hot spot” areas are needed. There is no need to re-invent the wheel. We need to build on existing models, successes and best practices. The Foothills Research Institute, for example, has developed the

Foothills Landscape Management Forum⁴ which utilises an open source mapping application to capture and present spatial information.

A literature review examining such models would be a first step. Developing a pilot approach to testing and bringing best practice models to the British Columbia context would be a useful second step. These pilots would be different in scale and landscape and representative of critical areas of the province. The models will need to be creative and flexible to deal with changing information needs as different values arise. As with developing the vision, prime responsibility for this activity rests with the province of British Columbia. Stakeholders will of course have an important role to play.

Decision making

Much of the conversation revolved around various aspects of decision making and discussions on vision and information invariably linked back to this topic. This is the critical activity that supports the broad vision and allows for complementary uses of the resource and balancing of multiple resource values. It is at the decision making level that integrated sustainable resource management becomes operational.

Participants noted that operational decision making happens closer to the landscape and there appears to be a disconnect from strategic decision making (which is seen to flip-flop with political change). Operational and strategic decision making need to be linked for more integrity in managing the land base. This could be one product from a vision dialogue.

Decision makers need to be independent and representative and act with integrity within the legal framework (defined by a unified, consistent vision). Decision makers may be influenced by power imbalances and the role that reporting structures play in the feedback loop. Those making operational decisions should be independent of political influence and be attentive to both short and long term goals for what the people of BC wish to realize from their natural landscapes and resources. At the same time participants recognised the need for ongoing communication and the ability of community stakeholders to share local values and interests with operational decision makers.

The position of the Chief Forester needs to be strengthened. The independence and authority of the position appears to have diminished, reflecting a general trend of political influence. Bureaucratic integrity needs to be maintained and that integrity needs to be supported by the strength of the vision around integrated sustainable resource management. The example of the east-coast fishery was noted where political interference was seen to be a factor in the decline of the resource and the industry.

⁴ <http://foothillsresearchinstitute.ca/pages/Tools/FRIImap.aspx>

There is a need for operational decision making that is independent, expert, public, based on effective relationships, integrates different values, and is made at different landscape scales.

Participants noted that the new ministry (Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations) and Front Counter BC represent the right idea to get back to integration and greater coherence. There are still units that are not in the fold, but it is understood that change needs to be made incrementally. While the latest ministry structure provides opportunity for effective integration, there are operational issues that remain to be resolved for the function to be effective.

The previous model of the District Manager (following the 1995 era forest districts) was seen to be one model that might be effective in integrating landscape level decisions. Area Managers were responsible for landscape unit decisions and the District Manager provided general oversight and a bigger picture view of things.

This new, refined model would be influenced by ongoing effective communication with stakeholders and would not be ruled by a single industry. The size of “scale” or management units depends on issues, resources, etc. Local decisions may have an impact further afield and affect neighbours as well. The scale of area should be large enough to have the flexibility to adapt while minimizing impacts from disturbances. This highlights the importance of having a multi-scale approach to planning and decision making.

Communication and feedback between stakeholders and the decision makers might be effected through a local / regional “board”, comprised of experts and knowledgeable local stakeholders, which would advise the decision makers and provide planning guidance. An important concept here is the ability of this group to provide subjective valuation of hard-to-value resources such as water quality and habitat. This communication needs to be ongoing and open. Formal as well as informal channels of communication will be needed.

Models for community engagement need to be researched and tested. Building on existing models, there may be an opportunity for managers to implement pilot studies and proofs of concept. The Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board⁵ may provide one example to study and work with.

The strengthened model would provide for area based decisions that will support integrated sustainable resource management and bring a return to place based drivers. There will likely be differences between local information and regional and / or provincial interests. The District Manager representing a knowledgeable “landowner” would be able to correct any disconnect.

⁵ <http://www.bvcrb.ca/>

Recommendations

- 1) *The Province of British Columbia should commit to designing and piloting an inclusive process to develop an overall vision for integrated sustainable resource management of crown lands.*

This process would test public and stakeholder engagement methods, integration of expert advice and the process for incorporating local values and visions into a strategic provincial vision

- 2) *The Province of British Columbia, in partnership with stakeholders should develop effective information based decision support tools that identify appropriate indicators for a wide range of landscape values.*

Developing a pilot approach to testing and bringing best practice models to the British Columbia context, which would begin with a literature review, would be a useful step. These pilots would be different in scale and landscape and representative of critical areas of the province. The models will need to be creative and flexible to deal with changing information needs as different values arise.

- 3) *The Province of British Columbia should re-evaluate the operational management model of the District Manager in a renewed context where the manager is responsible for integrating information on all landscape values in decision making.*

The District Manager would need to operate within a coordinated and integrated governmental framework. Building on the direction initiated with FLNRO, developing a pilot approach to testing best practice models in the British Columbia context would be a useful step. These pilots would be different in scale and landscape and representative of critical areas of the province.

- 4) *The Province of British Columbia should examine the establishment of regional “Resource Boards” to advise decision makers and provide integrated resource management planning guidance on a regional scale.*

These boards, comprised of a broad set of stakeholder representatives from the environmental, social, economic and aboriginal communities, could be piloted in those areas examining the renewed District Manager approach. Where appropriate bodies exist, their location might inform the location for the District Manager pilots.